

TOWN HALL MEETING ON CLEAN WATER

There was a recent Town Hall meeting sponsored by State Representative Brian Banks on how to maintain clean water in the Great Lakes. Participating were representatives of Clean Water Action, the Sierra Club and the State of Michigan DNR. I also participated as a shoreline owner and because of my participation in the International Joint Commission (U.S.-Canadian treaty organization) Study on water levels in the Great Lakes.

Many good suggestions for residents (home owners and tenants) were raised during and after the meeting. The Sierra Club had a pledge form committing each person present to initiate at least one of the suggestions in the current year. Grosse Pointe Shores residents are encouraged to make the same pledge. The suggestions were the following:

- A. Suggestions on how to keep phosphates out of the lake. They contribute to growth of unwanted plant species in the water and damage fish and helpful aquatic plants:
 - 1. Do not use any fertilizer with phosphates; inevitably, it gets on sidewalks and driveways and goes down the drain. Use only organic fertilizers.
 - 2. Use organic cleaning products inside and out.
 - 3. Pick up all your "doggie dirt." It also produces nitrogen in the lake.
- B. Suggestions on how to keep other damaging properties out of the lake:
 - 1. Minimize the use of salt on driveways and sidewalks. Try to plow or shovel before ice forms. A better practice than salt is to use sand on any ice that does form.
 - 2. Monitor your use of plastics. Be sure all are recycled, rather than allowed to go into the lake. Research shows that fish are very adversely affected, as they eat the residue of plastics; often they die. There is a huge field of plastics in the Pacific Ocean which has been shown to reduce the variety of fish species many fold.
 - 3. Many regularly used products, including many cosmetics, incorporate minute particles of plastic. These badly affect fish when they are washed down the drain. Monitor your use of these products, by reading ingredient lists; try to minimize their use or use makeup remover.
 - 4. Do not put unused pharmaceuticals down the toilet or otherwise down the drain. Take advantage of the pharmacy programs to retrieve these pharmaceuticals or use the annual disposal day sponsored by all of the Pointes.
- C. Suggestions on how to take advantage of the natural filtering process of our soils. When water goes through soils, pollutants are naturally filtered away from the lake:
 - 1. Plant trees. They act like a canal to project water out into the land.
 - 2. Plant rain gardens which collect water and let it drain into the soil. Be sure they fully drain within 24-48 hours to prevent a breeding ground for mosquitos. The Grosse Pointe Farms park has a rain garden. I am sure your Farms friends would be happy to show it to you. The

sponsoring organizations (Clean Water Action and Sierra Club) have programs on how to start a rain garden

3. Install ditches, where possible, on your land to collect water and filter it into the soil (within 24-48 hours).
4. Let tall grasses grow; they have longer roots and propel water into the soil.
5. Plant native plants. The Sierra Club and Eastern Market are cooperating to mark such plants.
6. Do not allow downspouts to drain into driveways; make sure the water is projected onto the land or into a rain barrel. Use rain barrels that have a cover (to prevent mosquitos). Be sure the spout is as near the ground as possible to enable removing the water so you can easily water plants and the land. This also reduces water bills. Also, be sure the spout is brass, not plastic, as plastic tends to fail much earlier, requiring replacement.
7. Use permeable concrete for driveways, sidewalks and patios, or use brick pavers separated by soil, so water filters into the land.

D. Suggestions on how to minimize the amount of water we put down the drain. All of our water eventually flows to the Detroit Department of Water and Sewerage. Along the way it is held in retaining tanks until the central plant can handle it. When the system exceeds capacity, it releases untreated water and sometimes sewage directly into the lake. It is estimated that 117 million gallons have been so released this year (past three months) alone. We need to minimize what we put down the drain:

1. Turn off the water when you brush your teeth; turn it back on at the end.
2. Turn off the water when you peel and wash fruits and vegetables; turn it back on at the end.
3. Make sure all water in your outdoor sprinkler system goes only into the land and not down the driveway or sidewalk.
4. Do not run the dishwasher or washing machine when out of the house. This will facilitate the discovery of a major leak if a pipe or hose should break.

For those who are near the lake front should attack phragmites whenever they appear. The DNR has information on its website as to how to do this. In some cases, permits are required, as may be the use of licensed contractors. Phragmites have root systems that force out all other natural plants. They are very harmful to our lakes.

Try to incorporate as many of these suggestions as possible into your daily life. Our lakes (and ourselves) deserve it. The Sierra Club (313-444-3705) and Clean Water Action (586-493-0672) have helpful programs available.

Kay Felt, Council Member
Village of Grosse Pointe Shores,
A Michigan City